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SUBJECT: OMAN - FM'S BLAND INTERVIEW NONETHELESS IRRITATES YEMEN

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Oman's Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs, Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdulla (YbA) gave a lengthy interview to the London-based Arabic-language daily al Hayat. In it, YbA did not break new ground; instead, he did tour a large segment of the Omani horizon. Although he apparently intended no controversy, the interview aroused interest in Yemen. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) While the Sultan and virtually the entire Omani government were at the interior city of Nizwa for the Sultan's opening of the Council of Oman, the reception of new ambassadors' credentials (including that of Ambassador Schmierer), and the appointment of new Omani ambassadors throughout the last two weeks of November, YbA granted an interview there to al Hayat. YbA rarely does lengthy interviews; he apparently felt it time to reiterate his version of Omani policy.

¶3. (SBU) Questioned about fundamentalism and extremism in the Arab world, YbA gave a classic response that extremism is not a plague in the Arab world, but a stage that will end when those behind it end. He said that Omanis "are by nature not extremists and bloodthirsty and have therefore not been affected or [has it] led our country to tragedies and sorrows."

¶4. (SBU) On Gulf security, YbA stressed that Oman does not have a problem, as an Arab nation, with Iran. Thus, Arab League Secretary General Amr Musa's call for an Arab-Iranian Dialogue is positive. "Oman considers Iran a neighbor and this should be always considered positive and not negative," YbA said. On Iranian possession of nuclear weapons, YbA delivered another of his regular responses: why single out Iran, as "Israel, the United States, Russia and the west too have them?"

¶5. (SBU) When questioned on Yemen, YbA pronounced that he did not fear possible fragmentation of Yemen because of the Huthi rebellion or the Southern Movement. He said what worries Oman is the Yemeni inability to develop itself. However, the problems rob Yemen of the "precious time which they must exploit to build an economy and create the middle class which is the backbone of stability." He concluded this point by saying that "the Joint Meeting parties can, with the government, find the base that they agree on for absorbing all the problems in the north and south."

¶6. (SBU) When questioned whether Yemeni membership in the GCC would be a step for resolving Yemen's economic crises and the resulting poverty and unemployment, which provides fertile ground for political turmoil, YbA made the perhaps unfortunate statement "We do not think so in the GCC. We passed over Yemen's [membership] but the two sides will have a very special relationship." [Note: This reportedly caused irritation in Sanaa, but in fact the GCC and

YbA himself are on record as supporting eventual Yemeni membership in the GCC. End Note.]

17. (SBU) On November 26, "al Khaleej" and "al Hayat" both reported that "Islah" Party and opposition media in Yemen welcomed the call by YbA for dialogue between the Yemeni government and the opposition. The Saudi daily "al Watan" also reported that Yemeni opposition parties hoped now for Omani mediation with the government.
Schmierer